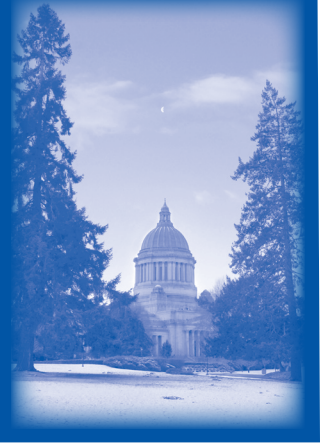




2010 Legislative Wrap-up

Mary Lou Dickerson
36th LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

It took a few weeks longer than I hoped, but we can all breathe a sigh of relief: We balanced our state budget in the face of the worst economic crisis and budget deficit since the Great Depression.

Fixing the deficit wasn't fun or easy. No one likes raising revenues—even temporary revenues—and some cuts to state services were deeper than I wanted or thought wise. But I am greatly relieved that we solved the budget crisis without abandoning our values or our moral compass.

To this day, some people are unaware of the magnitude of the fiscal problems we solved. It didn't help that a *Seattle Times* editorial created the false impression that state leaders wanted new revenues to increase spending. The truth is we needed to halt an unprecedented decrease in revenues that threatened to decimate funding for schools and other essentials. Here is the reality:

- Even with the new revenues adopted in April, total state general-fund tax collections for 2009-11 will be an estimated \$250 million *lower* than they were in 2005-07.
- Far from increasing, the 2009-11 budget is actually \$1 billion *smaller* than the 2007-09 budget—the first time the budget has actually shrunk since 1951.
- Despite our growing state population, there are about 4,100 fewer state employees (outside of higher education) today than there were in July of 2008. The number of state employees will continue to shrink as the latest budget reductions take effect.

I'm not proud of these facts. But they do show the size of the problems we faced and solved. You'll see more about the budget and the 2010 session inside.

Please remember that even though this legislative session is over, I work for you all year long. So don't hesitate to contact my Ballard district office with your thoughts, concerns or questions—serving you is a pleasure as well as an honor

Sincerely,

Mary Lou Dickerson

Mary Lou



2010 Legislative Wrap-up

36th LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Solving the Budget Crisis

I'm proud of our 36th District. When my January community survey asked whether we should fix the budget crisis by cutting spending, raising revenues or by a balance of budget reductions and new revenue, our district overwhelming supported the balanced choice. So did I.

As it turned out, the "balance" was heavily weighted toward budget reductions: For every dollar of added revenues in the biennial budget, there were \$4.50 in cuts. The new revenues include higher taxes on cigarettes, extending the sales tax to bottled water, candy and gum, and modest temporary tax increases on beer, soda pop and service businesses.

No one cheers higher revenues, but I was willing to support them to avoid far worse impacts on our schools, colleges, human services and other priorities. For example, these revenues saved:

- Prenatal support for 50,000 women with high-risk pregnancies.
- Health coverage for 76,000 people, including 16,000 children.
- Financial aid (need grants) for 12,300 college students.
- Early learning opportunities for 1,500 at-risk three-year-olds.
- "Meals on wheels" and other senior services for thousands of senior citizens.
- Smaller class sizes in kindergarten through 3rd grade.
- Hospice care for an estimated 2,600 dying patients.

The added revenues will also save many private sector jobs that depend on state funds or grants, including counselors, child care workers, long-term care workers, construction workers and many others. This newsletter is too short to list all the cuts that the revenue package prevented in education, health care, public safety and other services. The bottom line is that this budget crisis tested our character as a state, and we can all feel good that we passed the test.

Safe Baby Bottle Bill Wins Big!

The Legislature gets a gold medal for protecting children's health.

~ Washington Toxics Coalition ~

After two years of work, we passed the Safe Baby Bottle bill! We became the seventh state to ban the toxic substance bisphenol-A (BPA) from baby bottles, sippy cups and other food and drink containers intended for use by children under the age of three. And we became only the second state to ban BPA risks from sports bottles used by pregnant moms. The baby product protections take effect next year, the sports bottle protections a year later.

Over 150 independent studies link BPA to cancers, sexual dysfunction, diabetes and a host of other toxic threats. The breakthrough came when the federal Food and Drug Administration finally agreed that BPA poses risks to young children. I am deeply grateful for the support I received from our 36th District and from leaders such as the Washington State Nursing Association, Washington Environmental Council, Washington Toxics Coalition, and all the moms and dads who helped us to win this sweet victory for children's health!



The Security Lifeline

This bill is actually a form of crime prevention

~ Assistant Seattle Police Chief Nick Metz ~

The saga of the Security Lifeline reforms was like a microcosm of the 2010 session. Because of the deficit, essential services for low-income Washingtonians were on the chopping block. As Chair of the Human Services Committee, I knew we had to reform the safety net to save it. We responded with reforms that saved vital assistance by making state dollars go further and making better use of non-state resources.

Disability Lifeline

Many lawmakers wanted to totally eliminate medical and income assistance to 17,000 very-low-income



Washingtonians who can't work due to disabilities. It was a recipe for disaster. A third of these people are homeless. More than a third are mentally ill. Forty percent are women. All are struggling to survive in the deepest shadows of the recession.

Two assistant Seattle Police chiefs warned that ending the assistance would cause more crime, more hospitalizations, more acute mental-health crises, more homelessness—

and far more costs to Seattle and other local governments.

To save this vital assistance for people with disabilities, my Security Lifeline reforms included a Disability Lifeline that will speed transitions back to work, whenever possible, through time limits on assistance and required participation in treatment or rehabilitation programs. People who can't work again will be transitioned more quickly to federal disability benefits. It took most of the session, but we prevailed. I'm proud, and relieved, that our reforms will save \$25 million now and more in later budgets without abandoning people or our values.

Opportunity Portals

Another key part of the Security Lifeline reforms I sponsored launches an exciting public-private partnership to create a statewide network of high-tech Opportunity Portals. These portals will provide one-stop access to federal, state and local assistance that people are already eligible to receive but aren't getting.

Coordinating benefits to low-income individuals and families will help them transition to self-sufficiency sooner. It will also help our state by bringing hundreds of millions of additional federal dollars to Washington—including more of the \$140 to \$170 million in federal Earned Income Tax Credits that go unclaimed here each year. Leading philanthropies such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation believe so strongly in the potential of Opportunity Portals that they've agreed to pay all the start-up costs! This is a true win-win for Washington.

More 2010 Highlights

Levy lid improvements help Seattle schools

The Seattle school district and many others asked for more levy flexibility to cushion the impact of the recession-driven state budget cuts. I co-sponsored a law that provides the flexibility they need and temporarily raises the levy lid by four percent. These changes are a victory for local control that will translate into millions of additional dollars for Seattle schools.

Dropout Reengagement

Education is the surest ticket to prosperity, but Washington had no framework for reengaging dropouts. The Dropout Reengagement Act I co-sponsored creates a statewide framework of legal authority, model contracts and model agreements that allow (but do not mandate!) partnerships between schools, community or technical colleges, and

other public or community-based programs, to reengage dropouts and set them on a path to better lives.

Farmers market property-tax relief

The Department of Revenue threatened to end the non-profit status of churches or other groups that host farmers markets, since the markets involve commercial sales. I co-sponsored a property-tax exemption that allows them to host farmers markets for up to 53 days a year without losing their non-profit status. This will help sustain the entire farmers market network, including the markets in Phinney Ridge, Magnolia and the University District.

Clear Ballot Design

Research showed that as many as 40,000 King County voters failed to notice, or vote on, Tim Eyman's Initiative 1033 due to faulty ballot design. An election reform I co-sponsored requires clearer ballot designs to ensure this doesn't happen again.

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Banning shackles on inmates giving birth

We banned the use of shackles on women inmates during the birth process. This cruel and unnecessary practice poses serious health risks to mothers and babies and is categorized as torture by the United Nations. The law also puts other reasonable restrictions on how pregnant inmates can be restrained.

Jobs Act of 2010

As a co-sponsor of the Jobs Act of 2010, I was elated when we passed it in the closing days of the special session. It will create up to 30,000 good jobs by using bonds to leverage energy-efficient upgrades at schools and colleges. The energy savings of up to \$150 million a year will help pay off the bonds. It's a triple win for jobs, taxpayers and the environment!

Early learning for at-risk kids

Early-learning programs are among the most effective and cost-effective ways of helping at-risk kids succeed in school and life. As a long-time champion of early learning, I proudly co-sponsored this historic law to ensure voluntary early-learning opportunities for all educationally at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds by 2018.



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